



**Appropriations Committee Public Hearing
Governor's Proposed Budget
Department of Rehabilitation Services
Department of Social Services
February 16, 2017**

Testifying against the elimination of funding for the State Independent Living Centers and the consolidation of Birth to Three funding in the Department of Social Services.

My name is Molly Cole and I am the Acting Training Director for the University of Connecticut Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD). There are 67 UCEDDs across the country, with at least one center in every US state and territory. This national network of UCEDDs is authorized under Public Law 106-402 (The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 or "DD Act") and their core federal funding is administered by the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AIDD). The UConn UCEDD works with people with disabilities, members of their families, state and local government agencies, and community providers in projects that provide training, technical assistance, service, research, and information sharing, with a focus on building the capacity of communities to sustain all their citizens. Our activities are guided by a belief in individualized supports, inclusion, self-determination, natural supports and collaboration with organizations to address critical policy issues and systems change.

I am testifying today regarding the UCEDD's opposition to two budget items:

- The elimination of funding for the Centers for Independent Living from the budget of the Department of Rehabilitation Services and
- The shift of Birth to Three Services from the Office of Early Childhood to the Department of Social Services.

First, let me address the issue of the ILC's. The Independent Living Centers provide critical supports that promote community inclusion and self-determination for people with disabilities in our state. Our center works very closely with the State Independent Living Council. The UCEDD provides office and meeting space for the SILC and we partner with them on a number of policy issues and initiatives affecting people with disabilities. The proposed cuts will effectively force the five state Independent Living Centers to close their doors, and the vital services they offer to people with disabilities will be lost. These services include assisting individuals in developing lifelong independent living skills, finding and maintaining housing in their communities, developing job readiness skills and accessing employment, moving individuals into the community from nursing homes, and preventing the need for nursing home placement for others.

The ILC's do a remarkable job in supporting people with disabilities in their communities at a time when so many other supports have already been eliminated. They offer these supports with a small but very dedicated professional staff that are knowledgeable about their communities and the needs of people with disabilities. Elimination of the Centers for Independent Living will have a direct impact on the ability of our communities to provide services to people with disabilities where they live, work and play and on the ability of our state to move

people from costly institutional settings to appropriate and less costly community settings.

The small amount of state funding provided to the CIL's provides a vast amount of services and savings to our state. In FY 16 17,000 individuals received information and referral services on disability related topics; 213 individuals were transitioned out of nursing facilities, saving the state more than \$10.3 million; 2,533 individuals with disabilities received independent living skills training, peer counseling, advocacy and youth and educational services; 422 received services that prevented the need for costly emergency health, transportation and residential supports. If funding for Independent Living Centers is eliminated vital independent living services for people with disabilities will be reduced, including a loss of jobs for people with disabilities who are employed at these centers at a time when approximately 80 percent of people with disabilities are unemployed or underemployed.

Sadly, this is not the first cut to these vital services. The UCEDD firmly believes that balancing the budget on the backs of individuals with disabilities is not the solution to the state budget challenges.

The UCEDD urges the Appropriations Committee to retain funding for the Independent Living Centers as a vital and essential element of support services to people with disabilities in their communities.

The second area of concern is the shift of funding and administration of the CT Birth to Three Program from the Office of Early Childhood to the Department of Social Services. Our center is the only UCEDD in the country with a focus on early Intervention services. We are home to the Early Childhood Personnel Center, a national center funded by the Office of Special Education Programs. We also

provide extensive training and support to early childhood programs in Connecticut, including the Ct Birth to Three Program. We welcomed the move of program oversight to the Office of Early Childhood. The decision to move the entire program under the Department of Social Services is very concerning. Early Intervention is far more than a Medicaid payment program. It offers vital information, support and services to families of very young children with developmental disabilities. As stated in the budget, the purpose for this move is to “better align Medicaid funding and health services under the appropriate agency.” The UCEDD maintains that Birth to Three services are about supporting young children with disabilities and families, not alignment of funding and health services. The Office of Early Childhood is a good fit for this program, whose mission is “to support all young children in their development by ensuring that early childhood policy, funding and services strengthen the critical role families, providers, educators and communities play in a child’s life.” We believe that the qualitative aspects of this program will be lost if it is only viewed as a Medicaid program, not as a vital service for young children. Further, we believe that this move will require an amendment and approval from OSEP prior to moving the program. Such approval could not be obtained in this budget cycle.

For these reasons, the UCEDD opposes the transfer of Birth to Three from the Office of Early Childhood to the Department of Social Services.

Thank you.
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